

Yesterday was the 35th anniversary of the landing of Apollo 11 on the Moon and I, along with my wife Karen and our 12-year old son Michael, were overwhelmed to be a part of a small celebration at the Air and Space Museum that featured appearances by scores of astronauts, including the entire crew of Apollo 11. We arrived to a bustling reception in the museum after votes had ended around 6:30. My son was feeling under the weather but didn't want to miss the chance to see or maybe meet these legendary American heroes. You see, the Pence family are all "space nuts." I have attended two separate launches before the Shuttle was grounded and have developed a personal relationship with many of the brave men and women at NASA through my work on the Science Committee. This was to be a special night, even from the cheap seats.

When we arrived we were escorted to a very small waiting room off of the main floor of the theatre at the museum. Ten people were in the room and there they were - Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. I grabbed my son's hand (the one he won't be washing for a week) and made a "b-line" to both men. After introducing my son to the first and second men ever to walk on the moon, I chatted with both men about how long it seemed from that fateful day that they stepped into the history of mankind and I sat in my living room (age 10) straining to see a glimpse of that moment on our black and white television. Neil Armstrong said, "ya know, it really doesn't seem like 35 years have passed." The two astronauts greeted one another as long lost friends as the Pences stood inches away. It was an awesome moment and one I know we will never forget.

Later I traded Indiana stories with Apollo 13 hero Captain Jim Lovell (he grew up in Indiana and was a Boy Scout in Terre Haute) and watched as the last man on the Moon, Gene Cernan, regaled my son about chance for him to be an astronaut. There are days this job takes a toll on our family, yesterday was not such a day. I left with a great sense that we must and we shall return to the Moon, as President Bush has challenged us, and soon make new heroes for grown men and little boys of the future as we go from the Moon to Mars to the stars. As we drove home sharing reflections on our brush with these colossal heroes of the American space age, my son summed it all up saying, "awesome Dad, totally awesome." Couldn't have said it better myself. Thanks Indiana.-Mike Pence